

Comments Anger Bomb Survivors - McVeigh's Mother Says Families Should Put Attack Behind Them

Dallas Morning News, The (TX)
December 3, 1999 | Page: 39A | Section: NEWS

Oklahoma City bombing survivors and members of victims' families say they are shocked and enraged at comments by Timothy McVeigh's mother that it is time for them to get over the 1995 terrorist attack.

"It was a big event, yeah, but so was the O.J. Simpson case, so was the bombing in New York City," Noreen "Mickey" Hill told a television station in Tampa, Fla. "Every bombing or shooting is a big case. Plane crashes - there's more people killed in a plane crash than was killed in Oklahoma.

"And yet these people think they're the only victims? I do feel sorry for them. But let's face it: This happened four-and-a-half years ago. Let's get it out of our minds. Let's get it out of our lives."

Mr. McVeigh, 31, was convicted in federal court of conspiracy and murder and sentenced to death for the April 19, 1995, explosion that killed 168 people, including 19 children, and injured more than 500 others.

The Persian Gulf War veteran is on federal death row near Terre Haute, Ind. No date has been set for his execution.

Mrs. Hill's comments were broadcast Wednesday in Oklahoma City. Survivors and victims' families contrasted her remarks with those of the parents of Michael Fortier, a former McVeigh Army buddy who was sentenced to 12 years in prison after pleading guilty to several federal charges, including that he knew of the bomb plot but failed to alert authorities.

Paul and Irene Fortier of Kingman, Ariz., told The Dallas Morning News that they have endured 55 months of sleepless nights and torment, public scorn and thoughts of suicide. They stressed they love their son and remain devoted to him, but they also expressed profound sympathy for survivors and victims' families.

"You feel for those people," a tearful Mrs. Fortier told The News. "They're human beings. They've lost loved ones. We know what they're going through and it makes it hard for us because we wonder . . . if Michael . . . had said something, all these people would be alive."

Jennifer Howe, the Tampa television reporter who interviewed Mr. McVeigh's mother, said Mrs. Hill appears to be a "warm and engaging person."

"But when you hear her talk, you don't pick up any empathy for the victims," Ms. Howe told USA Today .

"Can't feel sorry'

Jannie Coverdale, who lost two grandsons, Aaron and Elijah, in the attack, said she was shocked at Mrs. Hill's comments.

"In the past, I felt sorry for her because that was her son," Mrs. Coverdale said. "I can't feel sorry for her anymore."

Martin Cash, who lost an eye in the blast, said he'd like to see whether she feels the same way once her "poor excuse for a son" is executed.

He said he believes he knows where Mr. McVeigh got his uncaring attitude.

"I've wondered for a long time . . . because his dad seemed to be a pretty compassionate individual."

Mr. McVeigh's lead trial attorney, Stephen Jones of Enid, Okla., said Mrs. Hill's comments were "unfortunate."

He reminded victims that Mrs. Hill has a history of emotional troubles and urged that her comments be evaluated in that light.

Not a monster

In the interview, Mrs. Hill said her son is not the monster others think he is. She said Mr. McVeigh, the middle of her three children, was a happy kid who never showed an interest in guns, handled his parents' separation well and planned to be a career soldier.

"He was full of the devil. He was your typical boy," she said.

She said she still finds it hard to believe he masterminded the bombing.

Mrs. Hill, who lives in Pensacola, Fla., was known as Mildred Frazier at the time of her son's trial in 1997. She had separated from Mr. McVeigh's father, Bill, when her son was a teenager in 1986 and he had stayed with his father.

"Face in shock'

She remembers when her son was led past television cameras after his arrest.

"Everybody's hollering "Baby killer! Baby killer!" Everybody said, "That's a look of hatred," " on his face, Mrs. Hill recalled.

But the expression on her son's face was not hatred, she said. "To me it looked like a face in shock. It looked to me like he was in total shock. . . . It was like his face was just frozen."

She disagrees with people who depict her son as a monster.

"I've seen people in prison that are monsters," Mrs. Hill said. "I've never seen my son act like a monster."

She said she talked to Mr. McVeigh by telephone after his conviction.

She said he tried to comfort her. "Mom, try to think of it as if I'm in the Army. Just pretend I'm in the Army," she said he told her.

Another former Army buddy, Terry Nichols, 44, was sentenced to life in prison after he was convicted in federal court of conspiracy and involuntary manslaughter for the deaths of eight federal law enforcement officers who died in the attack.

Mr. Nichols also faces state murder charges in Oklahoma for the deaths of the 160 others who died in the blast. Prosecutors said they hope the trial can begin sometime next year.

Staff writer Arnold Hamilton in Oklahoma City and The Associated Press contributed to this report.

Caption: PHOTO(S): Noreen "Mickey" Hill . . . says the bombing was "a big event," but it's time to move on.